NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, *238 William St., N. Y.*

No. 373. *Price, Five Cents.*

THE QUEEN OF THE SEVEN

NICK CARTER AND THE BEAUTIFUL SORCERESS

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

In an instant Nick's bonds were severed by the keen knife in the hands of Ten-Ichi, and the detective leaped upon Dazaar and bore him helpless to the ground.

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THE QUEEN OF THE SEVEN;

OR,

Nick Carter and the Beautiful Sorceress.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A PHANTOM OF THE PAST.

Nick Carter was in the act of leaving his house—indeed, he had just closed the door behind him and was about to descend the steps to the street, when a handsomely appointed coupé, drawn by a pair of magnificent gray horses, pulled up and came to a stop directly in front of him.

There was a coachman and footman on the box, and the latter quickly leaped down and opened the door of the equipage.

Then the detective, who had paused upon the topmost step leading to his residence, saw first the dainty foot and ankle, and then the superb and beautifully habited figure of a woman whose features were tantalizingly only half visible through the spotted white veil she wore, descend from the carriage and come toward him.

In dress and appearance, Nick Carter was the shrewd, portly and prosperous-looking middle-aged business detective so well known in Wall Street and the vicinity of the money center of the city, and suspecting that the woman's errand was to see him, he awaited her approach.

He noticed as she crossed the sidewalk toward him that she carried herself with remarkable poise and grace, and also that everything connected with her well-appointed equipage, from the tips of the horse's ears to the gestures and attitude of the trained and experienced coachman, suggested a woman of quality and refinement. And then, as she paused with a half-deprecatory and hesitating gesture, he raised his hat to her.

"You are Mr. Carter," she said, in a voice that was singularly sweet; and the remark fell upon his ears more as an announcement than as an interrogation.

"Yes," he replied. "Can I be of service to you, madam?"

"Indeed, you can, Mr. Carter, if you will be good enough to give me a few moments of your time. I am most fortunate to intercept you as you were on the point of leaving your home, and I might not have had an opportunity to call here again for many a day; perhaps never."

Nick had reopened the door while she was speaking, and he appeared not to notice the evidently intended significance of her remark as he stepped aside and signified by a gesture that she was to precede him into the house.

A moment later they were in the reception room, and Nick, having directed her to a chair, and himself selected another that was between her and the light, saw her as she raised her right hand with a graceful gesture to throw aside her veil. But he was nevertheless unprepared for the revelation of such unusual and startling beauty as confronted him then. More, he was forced to the silent admission to his own consciousness, that there was something strangely familiar to him in the lineaments of that beautiful face.

Although he did not seem to hesitate, and in reality appeared to be waiting for her to begin the conversation, he studied her face for a full minute in silence, and then, greatly perplexed—for it rarely occurred that he could not instantly recall features he had once seen—he was on the point of confessing to himself that he was mistaken in his supposition, when, like a flash, it became clear to him who it was that she resembled.

"Olga Plavatski! The Princess Olga!" was the mental comment he made, and then he smiled, for well he knew that the grave could not give up its dead, and well he knew, also, that Olga Plavatski was long since dead. Beautiful Olga, who willingly gave up her life that he might live. Olga, the wild, almost untamed Russian princess, who as the Queen of the Nihilists had first defied him, and then sacrificed her life to save him. Readers of the Nick Carter adventures will remember her as associated with the Diamond Smugglers in Paris, and will remember how she died. Five years had passed since that time, and Nick was perfectly aware that this could be only a chance resemblance; and yet it was so startlingly real, and the perfection of it brought back to him such a flood of recollection that he was instantly conscious of an intense and kindly interest in this stranger, because of it.

For once, too, he permitted something of what was passing in his mind to find expression upon his features, and the woman, evidently reading the good will that he felt for her, smiled in sympathetic acknowledgment of it.

Then she startled him again, for she said:

"I am quite sure, Mr. Carter, that I have never seen you before to-day, and yet I could almost swear that I had known you before—that somewhere in the past we have met. Only——"

"Only what, madam?" he asked, still smiling back at her.

"My remark will seem foolish, I know, but I was about to add that when we did know each other in that past, which I seem to have forgotten, you were younger, less portly, and—and—really, I do not know how to express what I wish to say."

Then Nick Carter did a strange thing; strange, indeed, for him to do, and he even wondered at himself while he did it. He excused himself abruptly, and left her.

"Wait, madam," he said. "I will return in a moment."

He hastened to his own private den, and rapidly divesting himself of the Wall Street disguise, returned

presently to the reception room in his own proper and handsome person—the real Nick Carter, whom so few people in the world are privileged to know.

When he re-entered the room and confronted her, the strange woman leaped to her feet and clasped her hands together in speechless astonishment, and for a moment she was posed before him like a statue of beauty, bending half forward with parted lips and sparkling, limpid eyes, and then, as if the vision, or the effect of it had passed, she sank backward again into her chair, breathing quickly, and with the suggestion of tears in the depths of her matchless eyes.

"Now, indeed, I am sure of it!" she exclaimed. "Now I am sure of it, and I thank God that I came here to-day. I thank Heaven that I was impelled to come to you, for I know that it was the spirit of her memory and her love that sent me to you."

"The spirit of whose memory and whose love?" asked Nick, mildly.

For a moment she was silent, and she left her chair and crossed the room and returned again before she replied. Then, as if she were referring to a commonplace thing instead of giving utterance to a name which Nick supposed the world had forgotten, she said, quietly:

"Olga Plavatski's."

The detective made no attempt to conceal his astonishment.

"You refer to one who has been dead more than five years," he said. "May I ask you to explain?"

"I refer to one whom I have been told I greatly resemble," she replied. "Is that true? You knew Olga Plavatski and you can tell me."

"Yes, madam. It is quite true. Remarkably true."

"I am glad; very glad."

"May I ask what was the relation between you? There must have been some blood relation, for such close resemblance can be accounted for in no other way."

"I do not know. I never did know, and therefore I cannot answer."

"Has it occurred to you that you have not yet told me who you are, and why you are here?"

"No. I had forgotten that—even why I came to you at all. But—my name is also Plavatski, like Olga's. My first name is Irma. I do not know if I have a right to the name of Plavatski, and save for my resemblance to Olga, whose picture I have, and who has been described to me time and time again, I would not believe it to be mine."

"Who has described her to you? Who do you know that has known her?"

"Ah, Mr. Carter——"

She paused and her eyes dilated with an expression that was akin to terror. She started to leave her chair, but sank back into it again when she had half-risen, while the detective waited in silence for her to continue.

"Let me tell you my story in my own way, Mr. Carter," she said, presently. "In telling it I think I will explain all the questions you would ask concerning Olga Plavatski as well as myself."

Nick bowed his head in acquiescence, and with ever-growing and expanding kindliness in his disposition toward her. It was his habit when time did not press to admit the impulses of others, when they sought to relate their troubles to him, and while there were many questions in his mind that he would have liked to ask without delay, he knew that there would be ample time for that part of the procedure.

He admitted to himself, however, while he changed his seat again to the one between her and the light, that he already felt a strange and unaccountable interest in this strangely beautiful woman.

Her exquisite face, so like the wonderful beauty that

had been Olga's, was as innocent and guileless as a child's, and he could discover within it nothing but purity and gentleness. Nor did her expression indicate anything of suffering and sorrow, but rather a kind of childlike fright that had in it something more of amazement than of terror.

"Do I look like a sorceress?" she asked him, quite abruptly.

"Scarcely that," he replied, smiling.

"Yet, I am called one; in reality I suppose I am one."

"A sorceress?" he said, with a rising inflection in his voice.

"Yes."

"I must confess that the word, as applied to you, requires an explanation."

"And I cannot explain it more than to tell you the exact condition of things. That is why I have come to you, Mr. Carter. To tell you many things which I cannot even attempt to explain. To relate to you one of the most inexplicable stories you have ever listened to, and to ask you, when you have heard all I have to tell, to use your unequaled abilities to explain it for me, and to free me from a condition which I believe to be unlike any other circumstance in the world."

"You have interested me very greatly already."

"Before I proceed, sir, I beg that you will promise me one thing that I shall ask."

"What is it?"

"That you will believe what I have to say to you during this interview, no matter what may happen hereafter to make you doubt. I want you to promise to believe in my sincerity now, and not to believe anything that I might say, or to hold me responsible for anything that I may do, when I am not as I am now."

"You puzzle me more and more," he commented, "but I think I may safely make you those promises."

"Ah, you think you may, but will you live up to them? Who knows?"

She left her chair suddenly and crossed over to him. Then, sinking upon one knee before him, she raised her beautiful face until her limpid eyes were within a few inches of his own.

"Look at me," she said, in a tone that was almost a command. "Look deep into my eyes. Remember what you see there—truth, sincerity and reality. Remember how my eyes appear when they are true, sincere and real, and"—she rose and returned to her chair—"whenever you think you have cause to doubt me, or to doubt what I have said and shall say to you to-day, or to doubt even the evidence of your own senses concerning me, look into my eyes again as you have done just now. You will see that they are different. They will be my own eyes, but it will not be my own soul that looks out of them upon you. You will see the face, the features, the physical body and the general appearance of Irma Plavatski, but Irma Plavatski will be absent. She will be there in body, but not in spirit, in soul. Instead of Irma you will recognize the sorceress. Instead of Irma Plavatski, you will be in the presence of a creation of the devil."

"My dear madam——" began Nick, but she raised her hand and stopped him.

"I am not mad," she said, with a piteous smile. "I am perfectly sane; and I have come to you to-day, while I could steal away as my proper self, because you are the only person in all the world whom I feel that I can convince of the truth, and who, being convinced, can save me."

CHAPTER II.

MORE OF THE MYSTERY OF DAZAAR.

"Tell me your story," said Nick.

"There is so little to tell, and yet so much."

"Much or little, let me hear it."

"I do not even know my own age, Mr. Carter, but doubtless I am approximately correct when I say that I am twenty-four. I base that supposition upon the result of many questions I have asked from time to time since I made the resolution to escape from the awful chains that bind me."

She was silent for a moment, but as the detective made no comment, she continued:

"My earliest recollections begin amid my present surroundings, and during that time I have lived, at one time and another, in almost every country on the globe, although I have reason to believe that I was born in Poland."

"Your name would indicate that much."

"Yes; but there is more than my name to do that. However, that is not important."

"It may be, but we will touch upon it later."

"I am thoroughly educated—that is, so far as the ordinary branches of learning are concerned, and I am more or less expert in that branch of knowledge which by some is called black art, or black magic."

"Is that why you have called yourself a sorceress?"

"No. It is because the part of me that is a sorceress cannot avoid imparting some of her unwholesome lore to the real Irma Plavatski."

"You speak in riddles."

"I know it. And there are other and greater riddles to speak of before I am done."

"Pray continue."

"I speak fluently all the modern languages, and—but it is needless to recite my accomplishments. The plain fact of the matter is that I am a prisoner, and that I have been one all my life. A prisoner in a gilded cage where the bars are so deftly concealed that it seems like folly to believe they exist at all. As Irma Plavatski, I am spoiled and petted; and nothing is denied to me save my full liberty; but, Mr. Carter, the dreadful, awful truth is that I do not belong to myself; that I have no title to myself; my identity is not my own property; I am not a free agent; I am as absolutely under the control of another or of others as if I had no mind of my own, no will of my own and no muscular power of my own. Just now, and here, I am Irma Plavatski. When I leave you and return to the influence of those who exercise control over me, I will become another and a different person altogether."

"Then why return to them? Why not exercise the right of freedom while it is within your grasp? Mind, I am not advising you, because I have not yet heard sufficient of your story to feel that I have the right to advise, but supposing all this that you have described to me to be as you represent it, or shall I say as you honestly believe it to be, why not take advantage of the opportunity afforded you now, and remain away from the influences you both dread and fear?"

"Because I am as powerless to remain away from Dazaar——"

Nick Carter bounded to his feet.

"From whom?" he demanded.

"From Dazaar."

Nick returned to his chair. Irma had neither moved nor expressed surprise because of his action, and he asked, calmly:

"Is it a man called Dazaar who exercises this control over you?"

Her reply was even more enigmatical than her former statements.

"Dazaar is only a term to express an idea," she said. "It is not a name—at least, not in the sense in which you make use of names."

"I do not understand."

"Neither do I."

"But what do you—yourself, I mean—understand by the name, or word, Dazaar?"

"I?" she asked.

"Yes. What does the word Dazaar mean to you?"

"I hardly know. It is a difficult question to answer."

"Try to answer it in the simplest manner possible. You have interested me more than you know."

"Because you think you have captured Dazaar?"

"Ah! You know that?"

"I know that you believe Dazaar to be at this moment a prisoner in a cell, but I also know that you are mistaken."

Nick smiled broadly.

"Your confidence in him is too great—in me too little," he said. "Dazaar is at this moment confined at police headquarters, doubly watched so that there can be no chance for him to escape."

"It is as impossible to imprison Dazaar and to hold him," she said, calmly, "as it would be to imprison the falls of Niagara and to hold them. Did you ever read the story of the dragon with seven heads, upon whom, if you severed one head from his body, another head grew instantly?"

"Yes," said Nick; "but that was a story for children."

"True. And Dazaar is a story for men. The story of the dragon was a fairy story, and therefore untrue; but the story of Dazaar is not a fairy story, and it is true."

"Let's get back to the subject," said the detective. "You were on the point of telling me what the word Dazaar means to you. Let me hear your explanation, please."

"Ah, what does it mean? Infinite kindness and implacable cruelty; supreme gentleness and indomitable power and force; the best there is of good and the worst that can be of evil; a god and a devil; a saint and a reptile; one person and many persons—or, to express that last thought better still, one person in many persons and many persons in one person. Dazaar? It is a word, not a name; a power, not a mere man; a terrible thing to which the power is given to appear as a man or as many men, and I know not, too, if it be not one of Dazaar's prerogatives even to take the form of a woman."

Here she bent forward and rested one hand upon the arm of the chair in which Nick was seated, while she added, in a low and impressive voice:

"There are times when I seem to be sleeping and dreaming when it seems as if I, my own self, have been transformed into Dazaar, and—but I could not convince you of this."

"Why not?"

"You would refuse to believe."

"I will at least appear to believe, at least until I can convince you that your own belief is wrong, if you will be frank and tell me everything that concerns you and this being whom you call by the name of Dazaar."

Irma sprang to her feet.

"Listen," she said. "I will tell you as much as I can tell in the little time that is left me, for I feel even now the influence that is drawing me back again—no, not back, but somewhere—I know not where.

"There is a woman who is my constant companion. She has been with me since I can remember anything. She says that I am a Russian princess in my own right. It is she who has told me about Olga Plavatski, whom I resemble, and she has told me many other things about myself and my family, always at the risk of her life. But that does not matter, only to say that I was taken, when I was a babe, by Dazaar—and there are so many Dazaars that I do not know which one. They are all the same to me, even though they may not look the same nor speak the same.

"I was taught, taught, taught, everything to be acquired, it seems to me; but every day—always, since my memory serves me—every day I have had the strange experience of feeling that another personality

than my own was crowding its way into my being and pushing me out of it, until, with each experience, it seems as if I actually stood aside while another person took my body and did what they pleased with it; and always, I seem to hover near, to see everything and to know everything, vaguely, as one in a dream."

"This is a strange tale, mademoiselle."

"Ah, you do not know half of it yet. Suppose, Mr. Carter, that there were another person in the world so exactly like yourself that you could not determine between that other person and yourself; suppose that you were bound hand and foot, incapable of speech or action and were stretched upon that couch when the other person should enter, and that you could see that other person do things, hear that other person say things, and that you felt that the other person was acting with your muscles, speaking with your voice and thinking with your brain while you were helpless to interfere if you would and too indifferent to interfere if you could; if you can suppose all this, you can understand exactly what I find it impossible to explain."

"I might suppose all this, save that part of it which refers to the indifference. I think if another person had my personality, and attempted to do things with it of which I did not approve, I should interfere."

"Not if you had been accustomed to such occasions all your life."

"Perhaps not."

"That is the condition under which I exist."

"A condition of hypnotism."

"I expected you to say that, but I know that it is not hypnotism."

"You know that it is not?"

"Yes, I understand hypnotism, among other things; I even practice it sometimes. This is quite different."

"How is it different?"

"If I were under the influence of hypnotic power, I would be made to say and to do things against my will, and I would be helpless in the power of the one who controlled me. In this case I do not do things against my will, for I do not do them at all. It is another and different person than me who does them. I neither lose consciousness, nor the power to think. I am just outside my own body; a creature with no visible existence and yet entirely extant. I have simply loaned my eyes and voice, my ears and features and my whole physical existence to another. Mr. Carter, it is that other Irma Plavatski—for my name is loaned as well as my body—who is the sorceress. It is that other Irma whom you will some time see, and believe to be me, and it is that other Irma from whom I beg you to deliver me, for that other Irma is—*Dazaar.*"

CHAPTER III.

A TEST OF THE POWER OF DAZAAR.

That the detective was greatly impressed by the story that Irma told him, as well as interested in her confessed association with Dazaar, goes without saying.

Dazaar, whom the readers of the last number of the Nick Carter stories will remember, was at that moment confined in a cell at police headquarters, securely watched, and was destined, as Nick and his assistants believed, to pay the full penalty for murder, but although he had been captured, and just at the time when he was about to become the instrument of death in a most horrible form, to Patsy, the detective was well aware that there were other and further mysteries connected with his career which would have to be solved before long.

When Nick was in the act of descending his front steps at the time when Irma's carriage appeared on the scene, he was on his way to police headquarters to question the man, and from there he intended visiting the house where the arch fiend was captured, through the instrumentality of Ten-Ichi, Nick's Japanese assistant.

But now, in the person of the beautiful Russian, the

opportunity to learn more concerning the strange being was immediately at hand.

It would not be the exact truth to say that the detective believed in the verity of everything that Irma told him, but it is truth to assert that he believed in her sincerity.

One of the detective's keenest attributes was his unerring reading of character, and in the sweetly-beautiful face of the young woman before him, he saw nothing but sincerity and honesty.

Whether she had told him the truth or not, he was positive that she believed it to be the truth, and judging merely from what he had personally seen, and what he personally knew about the strange being who worked in such mysterious ways and who called himself Dazaar, Nick was confident that Irma had not overestimated the strength of the influences which controlled her, and which compelled her to obey, and, therefore, as soon as she ceased speaking, he reassured her.

"No person, man or woman, ever appealed to me in vain," he said to her. "If I do not accept all that you have told me as literal truth, I at least believe implicitly in you, and you may trust me when I say that I will help you. Your resemblance to Olga, whom I will never forget, would alone commend you to me. She would be scarcely older than you are now had she lived, and I am compelled to the belief that if the truth were known, you were closely related by the ties of blood. But we will let that pass for the present. Just now, I wish you to answer a few questions. Will you do so?"

"Anything that I can, only let me pray of you to make haste, for I have the feeling that my time will be short. I may be called away at any moment now."

"Called away? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that when the impulse comes over me that I must go, go I must."

"You mean that Dazaar calls you? Is not that hypnotism?"

"No. It is habit. The habit of a lifetime."

"Dazaar is in prison now. He would hardly call for you to go there."

She shook her head, smiled sadly, but made no reply.

"Whose carriage was it that brought you here? Dazaar's?"

"No; my own."

"Your own?" Nick asked, quickly.

"At least it is called my own. I have a large house, a vast estate, a retinue of servants and every appointment that a woman's heart might desire. Everything is supplied to me—everything save liberty."

"Where is this house?"

"On the west bank of the Hudson. It is a house like a mediæval castle and was formerly known as Dreamland. It was for a long time deserted, I believe. Doubtless you know the place."

"Perfectly. It was within a few miles of there where I captured Dazaar."

Again she smiled, but said nothing, but it was quite evident that she did not believe that he had really captured Dazaar.

"You live there alone?" he asked.

"With the woman I just told you about, the servants and—Dazaar in one form or another, whenever he chooses to come."

"Pardon me, but does he ever come in the form of a lover?"

"Never," she replied, calmly. "Lovers and Roman emperors are in the same category with me; all I know about them is derived from books I have read."

"Why, then, do you make us of this phrase, 'Dazaar in one form or another?' "

"Because it is true. There is always a certain resemblance of feature, but beyond that no likeness whatever."

"Nevertheless, we will refer to him by making use of the pronoun he. You say you are denied your liberty. How, then, did you manage to make your escape to-day, long enough to come here?"

"Because he was unaccountably absent; and by absent I mean that he seemed to be for the time being beyond his influence over me. You say he is in prison?"

Nick nodded.

"Perhaps he was, at the time you mentioned it," she continued. "He is not in prison now."

"Not in prison now? Do you mean that you think he has escaped since we have been talking together here?"

"I know that he has."

"How can you know such an impossible thing?"

"Look at your watch. Remember what I say and when I said it."

Nick did so.

"It is a quarter past ten," he said.

"Hurry, Mr. Carter, with your questions. I may start away and leave you at any moment now, and you must forgive me if I do so. I cannot help it."

"Why did you come to me?"

"Old Aira advised it."

"Who is she?"

"The woman who lives with me."

"How did she know about me?"

"Through Olga. Hurry, please."

"And she also knew my address?"

"She told me she had carried it about in her memory five years."

"Can I see her if I go to your house?"

"God knows. No, no, no! You must not try to go there."

"Why?"

"Dazaar will get you."

"One would think that he is the bogey man."

"He is worse."

"But how can I help you if I do not go there?"

"Alas! I do not know. Aira said that you would find a way."

"Aira was right. I will find a way. Can you see me if I go there?"

"I do not know. Nobody ever came to see me."

"Are you always there?"

"Always. This is the only time I have been out of the grounds since we came here."

"How long has that been?"

"Oh, I do not know. Months, I think. Let me go now, Mr. Carter. I must."

"No; stay," he said.

"Ah, but I cannot. I must go."

She started toward the door, but Nick leaped to his feet and placed himself in front of her, and she paused, panting, before him.

"Let me go! Please let me go!" she begged.

"No," replied Nick, firmly, but kindly. "There will never be a better opportunity than this one to make a test of the power of Dazaar over you. You cannot go.—just yet."

"Please—please—please!" she gasped.

CHAPTER IV.

TEN-ICHI TAKES THE TRAIL.

"Wait," said Nick, kindly and gently, but firmly. "Remember your own statements to me, and consider therefore that I am not detaining you against your will, but against the will of Dazaar."

"Yes, yes," she said, piteously, "I remember; but I am suffering. Let me go—please let me go now, lest I suffer more."

"Lest you suffer more? Tell me what it is you fear."

"What I fear? Oh, I do not know. I cannot tell you. I fear—I do not know what I fear. Even if I should tell you, you would not believe."

"Yes, I will believe. Tell me."

She stepped back from him into the middle of the room again and seemed to the keen observation of the detective to be making a great mental effort for mastery over herself. More than that, she appeared to succeed, for the expression of pain which had for a moment almost distorted her features, gave place to a pathetic little smile, and she said, quite slowly, and therefore more impressively:

"This is what I fear, Mr. Carter, whether you believe me or not. I fear that the change I have described to you may take place before your eyes—that the other Irma Plavatski, who is the sorceress, will take possession of my body and senses before I leave this room, and that in listening to her you will forget all the promises you have made to me. Oh, I pray you, do not forget that you have promised to find a way to help me. Aira assured me that you could and would, and now you have said that you would."

"Whatever happens, I will not forget. Whatever happens, I will keep the promise I have made to you," said Nick.

"Won't you let me go now?"

"In a moment," replied Nick, still maintaining his position between her and the door. "Just now there are other questions I wish to ask."

"Hush!" she exclaimed, raising one hand in a gesture of warning.

The detective believed for a moment that she was about to faint, and he took one quick step toward her.

But he did not follow it up. Instead, amazed at her appearance and the expression of her face, he paused where he was and watched.

For one instant only her eyes closed, and in that instant she seemed to totter. It was then he thought she was going to fall at his feet; and yet the indication of it vanished almost as soon as it appeared, and Irma's form straightened and seemed to become rigid.

This second condition also lasted not more than one second of time. Then her eyes flew open again, the rigidity of her figure relapsed, and—to every intent and purpose, so far as mere observation was able to comprehend them, there had been a mere interval of faintness on the part of Nick Carter's guest, but she was now as well as ever.

Nevertheless there was a change, and the detective realized it at once. He was by no means prepared to accept the explanation she had given him in advance as accounting for the change, and he was not at all sure that an exceedingly clever actress was not trying to make a dupe of him. But, whether the change was a real one or merely the result of unusually clever acting, there was surely a change, and in the light of that fact, Nick instantly decided upon the course he would adopt. How well it proved itself to be the only correct course, a very few paragraphs will develop.

The changes visible to the detective were so slight that another person, less closely observant than he was, would not have noticed them at all, and indeed, in commenting upon them long afterward, he admitted that it was doubtful if he would have realized them at the moment himself, had he not been in a measure prepared for them, by the warning Irma gave him.

What he really saw, that could be denominated a change, was this:

He perceived a somewhat loftier carriage of the figure, as if it had suddenly grown the fraction of an inch taller and straighter. The head, too, seemed to be thrown a trifle farther back, and the traces of excitement that were upon her, owing to the fact that the detective had barred her egress from the room, had utterly disappeared. Her breathing, which a moment before had been quick and almost panting in her eagerness to get away, was suddenly as regular as clockwork. Her fingers, a moment before clinched tightly in the palms of her hands, were now relaxed

and as perfectly at ease as they could be. All of the impetuous anxiety she had manifested to leave the room and the house, had disappeared, and she now stood at perfect ease before the detective, precisely as if she had uttered some commonplace remark and was awaiting his reply.

But there was another, and to Nick, even a greater change than all others, in the expression of her eyes. He remembered, too, what Irma had just said to him about that very thing: "Whenever you think you have cause to doubt me, or to doubt what I have said and shall say to you to-day, or to doubt even the evidence of your own senses concerning me, look into my eyes again as you have done just now. You will see that they are different." And he could see that they were indeed different. All the limpid purity and youthful ingenuousness were gone. They were Irma's eyes in color and shape, but they were not hers in expression. Where there had been pleading trustfulness a moment ago, there was now a hard and worldly glitter. Where there had been appeal, there was now defiance; and yet, withal, the change was so slight, so very slight that it was almost imperceptible.

"What a wonderful actress—if actress she be," was the mental comment of the detective. Then, following out the resolution he had made on the instant that the change appeared imminent, he refrained from speaking, determined that he would take his clew from her, so that if within the realm of human possibility such a change as Irma had predicted were possible, he would utter no word of what had already passed between them.

So, for several seconds, both were silent, gazing upon each other.

Then, as Nick had intended it should be, it was the woman who spoke first.

"I believe I was on the point of taking my departure," she said.

"Yes," replied Nick, accepting the *rôle* cast for him. "Still, as you were just saying——"

"Yes?" she inquired.

"Won't you be seated?" Nick asked, in his suavest tones.

For an interval of time so short that it was hardly perceptible, Irma—or she who appeared to be Irma—seemed to hesitate. Then, with a graceful bow, and without a word of protest, or a gesture that could indicate that she had any recollection of having already expressed a desire to leave, she acquiesced and accepted the chair indicated.

Again the detective waited for her to speak, and still she seemed to desire him to take the initiative. Presently she spoke.

"What were you saying?" she inquired.

"I had finished what I was saying," said Nick.

"Ah, true, to be sure. I have made you a very long call, have I not? Really, now, how long have I been here?"

"Why, you only just came!" replied Nick, in a very good imitation of an exclamation point and with every evidence of astonishment.

"Only just came?" she echoed, with unmistakable relief in the tones of her voice. But she tried to conceal her evident pleasure at the thought that she had been in his company only a very short time, by laughing gayly—and not at all as Irma would have laughed five minutes sooner, Nick could not help thinking.

He was watching the woman before him narrowly, and he was compelled to the confession, made only to himself, mentally, that he was amazed.

"I am in the presence of the most accomplished and consummate actress the world has ever produced, or of the most remarkable circumstance that mortal man has ever witnessed," was the thought that leaped through his brain; and he determined in that instant to act and speak as if she had indeed just arrived. "I

will test her acting to its utmost capacity for cleverness, if it is acting," he said to himself.

Then, as if he were resuming a subject that had already been mentioned between them, but barely introduced, he said, aloud:

"Would you care to look at the jewels now?—at once?"

"The jewels? Ah, yes; certainly; at once, if you please."

Nick smiled grimly, and crossing the room, touched an electric button twice. Then, turning and facing her where he stood, he inquired:

"It was the ruby and diamond pendant to which you referred when you entered, was it not?"

"Yes, certainly," she replied.

He pressed the electric button twice more, and waited; but there was no answer, for the good and sufficient reason that those who heard the ringing of the bell knew from the fact that it sounded twice, that the detective desired no answer. As a matter of fact, the double ring was merely a signal to whoever happened to be at the other end, to get outside the house as quickly as possible and to shadow whoever might come forth from the conference with the detective.

It was Ten-Ichi who heard the ring, and before the second summons came from the room where Nick and his companion were talking, the agile Jap had slipped into a costume in which he was already half-arrayed, and was leaving the house by way of the adjoining street.

As soon as Nick felt that he had allowed time sufficient for Ten-Ichi to get a position outside, he remarked that it was strange that his ring was not answered, and begged to be excused while he went after the pendant himself.

"I will return in one moment," he said, and went out of the room, leaving the door half-ajar behind him and purposely demonstrating by the noise he made that he was ascending the stairs to the next floor.

Instead, however, of going in search of a diamond and ruby pendant, he prepared immediately to the front window directly over the room where he had left his guest, and even as he reached it, he saw her descend the front steps, glance hastily around her, espy the carriage that was waiting at the curb, and running forward, impart a hasty order to the waiting coachman and footman, and spring inside.

Instantly the carriage started down the street with the horses at a rapid trot, while just behind it, astride of a dilapidated old bicycle, was a negro lad, whose features, if the coloring matter had been absent, would strongly have suggested the identity of Ten-Ichi.

CHAPTER V.

THE KNIFE IN THE BOX.

It will be remembered that during the conversation between Irma and Nick Carter, she suddenly made the announcement that Dazaar had escaped from his cell at police headquarters and requested the detective to look at his watch; that when he did so, the time indicated on the dial was a quarter past ten.

Now, as Nick turned back into the room after seeing that Ten-Ichi was well on the trail of the woman who had just left him, he again glanced at his watch and discovered that just half an hour had elapsed since she made the announcement, and he decided that he would again assume the disguise that he was in the habit of wearing among brokers and business men downtown, and in which he was also known at the police department, and that he would make a short trip to Mulberry Street before carrying out his original intention of visiting the vicinity of the country house where Dazaar had been captured the preceding day.

Barely five minutes were consumed in making the

change, and he was on the point of departure from the house when the telephone bell rang.

Placing the receiver to his ear, the following conversation ensued:

"Is that N. C.?"

"Yes."

"This is headquarters."

"Well?"

"The inspector would like to have you come here as soon as possible."

"All right. Is it about the man I took there last night?"

"I believe so; but that is all I was told to say over the 'phone."

"Tell the inspector that I will be there in twenty minutes."

Nick hung up the receiver and for half a moment remained where he was, buried in thought.

"Here is a circumstance that comes near to being beyond me," he thought. "The remarkable tale told to me by Irma Plavatski seems too absurd for belief, and yet I had the evidence before my own eyes that it was true, or that she possesses a power that I have never been able to attain, even after years of study—that of completely changing the expression and character of eyes and face and compelling the change to appear perfectly natural. More than that, she announced the escape of Dazaar, and now comes a summons from headquarters which would indicate that something has happened there. Irma Plavatski might know that Dazaar intended to make the effort to escape, but she could not know that it would succeed, and even if it did succeed, she could not possibly know the time of it. She seemed not to know that he had been captured till I informed her, and the announcement she made seemed to be derived from intuitive perception rather than from pre-established knowledge, so now, if upon arriving at headquarters, I discover that he has escaped and that he did so at or near the time mentioned by her——"

He paused and started toward the door, and as he was passing out, added:

"Well, in that case, I am up against a proposition that is certainly much more concrete and puzzling than any I have ever faced before."

When he arrived at the headquarters of the department he was conducted immediately to the private office of the inspector.

"That Indian fakir you brought here yesterday was a slippery chap, Nick," said the inspector, motioning him to a chair beside the desk.

"How so?" asked Nick, accepting the chair.

"He walked out without even stopping to say good-by."

"Indeed! How did he do it? Vanish through the walls? or did your guard open the doors and bow him out of the place?"

"Well, not precisely either one, but a little nearer to the latter, I think."

"When did it happen? About a quarter past ten this morning?"

"Eh? Well, you have guessed rather close. It happened some time between ten and half-past. He was there, all right, at ten, and he was gone, all right, at half-past ten."

"Gone, eh?"

"Clean gone, Nick."

"How did he do it?"

"You can search me. There were two men watching him. Both of them swear that neither one went near his door and that they did not have their eyes off him for a minute; yet he couldn't get through the keyhole or between the bars. All the same, the door was locked, the men had the keys in their possession, and the cell was empty."

"Bribery," said Nick.

"The man didn't have a jewel or a dime in his possession, as you know. You were here when we searched him and took his property away."

"He knew where to get more."

"Doubtless. But I do not think it was bribery."

"What, then?"

"Hypnotism."

"What makes you think that?"

"Several things. The cells on that tier are all empty, save one, as you know. That one is occupied by Handsome Frank, the confidence man, and is three doors removed from the one where we put your Indian."

"Yes, I remember that."

"Frank says that one of my men deliberately walked up to the Indian's cell, opened the door and went inside while the other stood stock still, and although he appeared to see everything that happened, he made no effort to interfere."

"Well?"

"The one who entered the cell came out again after a moment or two, and Frank thinks that the Indian followed him. He could not see from where he stood against the bars of his own door. They went down the corridor in the opposite direction and passed through the door that communicates with the third degree room. The latter opens into this room through that door yonder, as you know. I was not here yet—it was just half-past ten when I arrived—and it was therefore an easy matter for Huyler to let the Indian into the main corridor from here. If anybody saw him they would think it all right, since he passed through that door from this office; but as far as I can find out, nobody did see him—not a sign of him."

"Well? And then?"

"I have only Frank's account of the matter to depend upon. He says that Huyler returned within two or three minutes, relocked the door of the cell from which he had taken the Indian, and then seated himself on the stool alongside of his companion, who was still standing. In a moment more Boulger—that's the other watcher—sat down also, and that neither spoke to the other for several moments. Then they began talking together in low tones, and that if either one had any idea of what had happened, neither showed it."

"What next?"

"Presently Boulger walked over to the cell and glanced inside. Then he let out a yell and Huyler went and looked inside. He yelled, too, and then both of them came to me. I had just come in."

"I see; what did you do?"

"I locked both of them up, of course. I'll know how to deal with them, all right. But that isn't the point."

"No; I know it is not."

"The point is that your man Dazaar is still 'wanted.'"

"And you are satisfied that it was hypnotism, inspector?"

"I am satisfied that Dazaar got away and that I will find out some day before very long how he did it. He's gone, and I'm going to turn loose my entire force to catch him, if necessary. It is up to me now. You brought him here and left him in my charge, and he has managed to get away. What I want to know of you is if you will help me to recapture him."

"I'll do more than that, inspector."

"What do you mean by that, Nick?"

"I mean that I will take the entire responsibility off your shoulders. No formal complaint has been entered against Dazaar, and the circumstance remains exactly as if he had not been here at all. How many people know about the escape?"

"Only Frank, my two watchers and myself."

"Good. Keep the thing quiet. Let it appear as if you permitted Dazaar to depart. Restore Huyler and

Boulger to duty, tell them to keep their tongues between their teeth and leave the whole affair to me."

"Do you really want it that way?"

"I really do."

"And Dazaar?"

"I'll get him if it takes a leg—or my life," said the detective, grimly.

"When you speak in that tone I think I can afford to take things easy."

"I'll get Dazaar, or I'll quit the business."

"I wish you'd tell me how you knew the hour of his escape," said the inspector.

"Because at a quarter past ten I was told to look at my watch, to remember the time, and that I would find out later that Dazaar had made his escape at that moment, or very near it."

"That sounds as if there were collusion from the outside."

"No, inspector. It was not collusion; it was——"

"Was what?"

"Inspector, did you ever hear of devil worship?"

"Yes."

"It is only a name used to cover the practice of a certain kind of magic, and unless I am greatly mistaken, I have fallen upon a nest of it of which this fellow Dazaar is the high priest. To tell you the simple truth, I am rather glad that he is at liberty for the present, for I will have a better opportunity to——"

What Nick Carter might have added to what he was saying is not known, for at that instant there was a summons at the door, and one of the headquarters' sergeants entered, carrying a small oblong box that was addressed to Nick Carter and his friend, the chief of detectives. It required but a moment to take off the wrappings and raise the cover, and then the two great detectives looked at each other in surprise, for reposing on a bed of leaves of poison oak was a gleaming, naked knife, and beside it was a card upon which had been written:

"With the assurances of fatality to both.—DAZAAR."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAKING OF THOMPSON'S CORPSE.

"That seems to be intended for both of us," said Nick, with a smile.

"Evidently," assented the inspector.

"I think it is no idle jest, either," continued the detective.

"No?"

"I know that he means to do for me, and now it would seem that he has included you in his programme."

McClusky shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"It isn't the first time in my career," he said. "Shall I leave the matter with you, Nick?"

"Entirely, if you please."

"All right. That's agreed. If you want any assistance or any men to help you, say so."

"I will. But——"

"Well?"

"Take care that you do not get a knife in your back from across the street somewhere."

"I'll keep an eye out, never fear."

Nick took his departure then, and speedily set out for his own house.

To the ordinary reasoner—and especially to those who have read the preceding number of this series—it would seem as if the very first move made by the detective should have been to take a posse of men to the house where he had captured Dazaar, and to clean it out root and branch; but Nick had his own good reasons for not desiring to act impulsively.

He had already seen and heard enough to satisfy him that much more consistent and painstaking work was required on his part in order to rid the world

finally of such a human demon as Dazaar was proving himself to be.

"A man like this archfiend does not carry all his eggs in one basket," he reasoned. "I begin to think that Irma's warning that he is like the dragon, and that if you cut off one head another grows in its place, is more than half correct. The thing for me to do is to get all those heads together in one basket, and to smash them all at the same time. That is the only way to beat Dazaar, sure."

When Nick arrived at his home and was in the act of ascending the steps to the front door, he paused in surprise to discover that it was widely ajar.

He glanced around him hurriedly, and then looked again into the front hall of his own house.

Everything was silent and seemingly deserted, and there was not a person in sight, so touching his sleeves to discover that his concealed weapons were safely in their places, he entered.

Still silence, and every evidence of desertion.

Greatly puzzled, he was about to ascend the stairs, when he espied a square of note paper pinned to the wall by a knife that was the exact counterpart of the one which had been sent to him at the inspector's office, and there was writing on the paper.

"That chap must buy his knives by the gross," he soliloquized, taking it down and holding the paper before him so he could read. "One thing is certain—he isn't going to wait for me to make a move; he's taking the aggressive himself. Well, he will find that I will meet him halfway."

Then he read what was written on the paper.

"My sweet friend Carter," it said. "So sorry to find you are not at home when I call. I wish to assure you that I have passed a delightful half hour in your establishment. You will discover that the members of your household are sleeping sweetly, notwithstanding that the time is midday, and that they will have no idea that I have been here. I have done this merely to show you how utterly the members of your private family, as well as of your official establishment, are at my mercy when I choose to exert my power. You will find that nobody has been harmed, and that none is aware of my proximity; but I may not be inclined to show an equal leniency when next I make my appearance."

That was all. There was no signature; but, nevertheless, Nick knew only too well who the writer was.

Ten-Ichi, he knew, of course, was out, since he had sent him to follow Irma when she drove away in her carriage; but Patsy was there, and should be in his room. If asleep, so much the better, since Nick had ordered him to keep to his bed part of the day, because of the severe experiences he had encountered at the house of Dazaar the day before.

Nick first hurried to the room where his wife passed most of her time, and even he was astounded by what he saw.

Ethel was seated near the window in the comfortable chair she affected. Her head was leaning back against the upholstery, and to all appearance she was enjoying an ordinary midday nap. At the farther side of the room the maid was reclining upon the sofa, also sleeping. The entire appearance of the room was as if nothing had been disturbed, and the occupants had fallen asleep quite naturally; and indeed, when he sought to awaken them, they opened their eyes at once, and both with very evident surprise that they had slept.

Nick questioned them as closely as he could without revealing his reasons for doing so, and having discovered that they knew nothing of what had actually occurred, did not apprise his wife of the truth.

Presently he descended the stairs to the servants' quarters, and there the same conditions were discovered. The cook was sleeping in her chair near the kitchen window, and the two remaining servants were

in the same peaceful, slumberous condition; but each was easily awakened, and each protested that she could not have been sleeping more than a minute and could not imagine why she had fallen asleep at all.

In the quiet of his own room, Patsy was also asleep, and Nick, after satisfying himself that the young man was breathing naturally, decided not to awaken him.

The door of Nick's private room, which he called his den, was always kept locked. It could only be opened by the pressure of a secret spring, the existence of which, as well as the manner of working it, was known only to his wife, his assistants and himself. Yet when he approached it that door also stood wide open.

The room, however, was undisturbed.

If the intruder had examined the contents, he had done it so dexterously that not a trace of his presence was to be discovered, even to the experienced and keen investigation of the detective.

"If it were not for the note pinned to the wall and the open doors, I would not have known that Dazaar, or anybody had been here," mused Nick. "I begin to think that he has not overestimated his powers of cunning, and that I am up against a stiffer proposition than I have ever faced before."

Stepping to the telephone, he called up the inspector and requested that an exceptionally good man be sent to his house at once.

"Chick is away, and Patsy is out of commission for the present," he explained. "I want a good man who is not afraid of the devil himself, and all that I want of him is to stay right here in my house and keep watch over the safety of my wife while I am absent."

Then, while he was awaiting the arrival of the man, he began the preparation of one of his masterpieces of disguise.

Ten-Ichi had made a capital crayon portrait of the man Thompson who was murdered by Dazaar, and whose body was at that moment undergoing preparations for burial at an undertaker's establishment in Second Avenue, and Nick, who remembered very well how that gentleman had appeared during their only interview in Union Square, placed the portrait beside his mirror and began to manufacture a living copy of it in his own person.

He occupied a full half hour in doing so, but the imitation was perfect when it was completed, while from his extensive wardrobe he selected a suit of clothes that was almost an exact copy of that worn by Mr. Thompson when he was killed.

"Good!" he said, studying himself before the glass. "This may prove to be the very worst selection I could have made for a disguise, and it may also prove to be the very best. I'll have to take a chance as to that. One thing is sure; it is the only one that will serve me in what I am about to do."

He had made himself taller than his real height by almost two inches, and this was accomplished by the use of especially prepared shoes of which he had a goodly supply.

Thompson's unusually high forehead, iron-gray hair and gray-pointed beard were also perfectly reproduced, and as Nick surveyed himself in the full-length glass, he was convinced that if he happened to meet any person who had known Thompson in life, and who had not been informed of his death, that person would be deceived.

He had just completed every detail of the disguise when the man came from police headquarters, and having given him his instructions, which were to remain on constant watch inside the house until his return, and on no account to permit himself to be called away or to relax his vigilance for a moment, he bade Ethel good-by and started out.

To arrive at the destination he had selected, it was necessary to cross the Hudson River at the One Hundred and Thirtieth Street Ferry, and to go from there

by trolley. A ride of something more than an hour would bring him to a point that was sufficiently near to his real destination, which, in this particular case, was Dreamland, the home of Irma Plavatski.

"If she drove into town from there this morning, in time to be at my house at the time she did, she either started very early or she made mighty good time," mused Nick, as he left the ferry-boat on the Fort Lee side, "and if she drove back all the way with those same horses, she won't get home very much in advance of my arrival on the scene."

The trolley he intended to take was awaiting the boat, and for a moment Nick thought he was to be the only passenger leaving the ferry by that route, but just as it was on the point of starting, a heavily built, swarthy-complexioned man with bushy eyebrows and a heavy black mustache entered the car and took one of the seats directly behind him.

Nick turned when the man entered, and gave him one quick, searching glance, and while there was nothing about him to indicate that the detective had any reason to regard him other than as an ordinary passenger, he still noticed that he was himself the object of a scrutinizingly searching glance on the part of the stranger.

"I think I'll sit behind that fellow," mused Nick.

Then he aroused and stepped outside the car, where he remained for half a minute, looking around him in every direction, as if undecided concerning the car he had taken. Then, apparently making up his mind, he entered it again by the rear door and seated himself at the very end of the car.

Soon they started. The conductor entered and collected the fares, returning again to the platform. He also closed the door behind him, so that Nick and the other passenger were alone.

In that manner they passed up the bluff, through Fort Lee and out upon the road where it passes through the woods, and then the stranger turned and looked squarely at the detective.

His stare was so intense and so continued that Nick could not ignore it, and presently he smiled genially, and said:

"Well, sir? No doubt you think you have met me before; or is it that you desire to be sure of me when we meet again?"

The man left his seat and came down the car to where Nick was sitting. Then, still standing in the middle of the aisle, and with an unmistakable rural accent, he drawled:

"Well, sir, I don't rightly know how to answer either of them questions; but I do know this much: I could take my oath that I saw you not an hour ago, stretched out in a coffin in an undertaker's shop on Second Avenue. Maybe your name is Thompson, too?"

"No," replied Nick, "it is just plain Thompson."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are Mr. George Thompson?"

"That happens to be my name, sir."

"Then you ain't dead, by jove!"

"I don't feel very dead, just at present, thank you."

"By Jove!" said the stranger, again. Then he dropped into the seat facing Nick and laughed long and heartily.

"Funniest thing I ever heard of," he exclaimed, presently.

"What is?" asked Nick.

"Why, you are," laughed the man. "You're Thompson's corpse, if ever there was a corpse in the world, and here you are walking around and riding on trolley cars, as large as life and as plain as day. If that ain't funny, you can shoot me!"

CHAPTER VII.

"A TRAP FROM WHICH THERE IS NO EXIT BUT DEATH."

"I feel like a moderately lively corpse," remarked Nick, when the other's laughter had subsided. "Perhaps you will be good enough to explain."

"Oh, that's easy. You see, I've often seen you on your way to and from the city, although I don't suppose you've got an idea in the world who I am. Well, I've got a cousin who is an undertaker on Second Avenue, and this morning I dropped in to see him. He had a corpse there, of a man who was stabbed under the arm with a knife, and who had been at the morgue. He said the man's name was Thompson, and that he had lived up in the nineties, somewhere; so I thought I'd take a look and see if it was the same man I knew; and it was—at least I sure enough thought it was the same. I reckon, mister, that you had better right about face and mosey over to Second Avenue, or they'll be for burying that other fellow and thinking it's you. One thing is certain: if you were to take a good look at him, you'd have to pinch yourself to be sure you weren't dead."

"I feel rather sure of it as it is. Won't you tell me your name?"

"Myers."

"Do you live near here?"

"Well, I reckon I live pretty close to where you're going. I run the farm up at Dreamland."

Nick started.

"So there is where you have seen me before, eh?" he asked.

"Yes; I've seen you there, but not so often as I have on the ferry—and up at the other place."

"What other place do you mean?"

"There ain't but one 'other place,' is there, mister?"

"There might be several within your meaning."

"There might be—but there ain't."

"Then you mean——"

Nick paused and waited for his companion to complete the sentence, but he only laughed aloud as he said:

"Yes; that's what I mean."

"What place do you mean, then?" Nick asked, determined to bring the man to the point.

"Why, yours, of course."

"Ah," said Nick, and relapsed into silence.

"It is evident," he thought, "that the place where Dazaar, or whatever name he goes by, lives, stands in the name of the dead Thompson, who is supposed to own it."

"Are you on your way home now?" he asked, aloud.

"Yes. I intended to take a day off, but I got tired of it early in the game and made up my mind to come home. I suppose you're going there, too, to see the mam'selle?"

"Yes; I was going there first."

"Well, then maybe I'll see you later. I'm getting off at the next crossing, but I'll be along in the course of an hour or so. So long, Mr. Thompson. You're about the liveliest dead one I ever saw."

In another moment Nick was alone, and ten minutes later he also left the car, and started on a twenty minutes' walk across a field and through a piece of woods for the house that was known far and wide as Dreamland. It had formerly been the residence of a family named Carrington, but now, for more than seven years, it had been left untenanted save for the presence of a caretaker, until the advent of Irma Plavatski.

"It, as well as this vicinity in general, is just the place for Dazaar and his evil works," thought Nick, "for the entire community believes that the house is haunted, and whether it is or not, it is so far away from traveled roads that one might drive through the neighborhood all summer long and never once pass its door."

Presently he came in sight of the mansion—an im-

mense, rambling, low-studded building partly of brick, partly of stone and partly of wood, as if succeeding generations of owners had put on additions from time to time without regard to material or plan.

Some of the buildings of which it was composed were three stories in height, many of them were only two, but the majority contained no second floor at all.

"It is like the patchwork of a crazy quilt," mused Nick, pausing at the stile and studying it narrowly. Then he continued on his way across the lawn, and soon mounted the short flight of four wide steps which took him to the main entrance.

"I wonder," he mused, "if Irma Plavatski and Aira have heard of the death of Mr. Thompson? and I wonder, also, if my sweet friend, Dazaar, happens to be here at this moment? I hope not, for the sake of my plans."

Then he rang the bell.

He knew that the other place, where he had so lately captured Dazaar, and where he had seen the instrument of torture, so cleverly constructed, about to be put in operation, was less than a mile through the woods from where he was then standing, and that to have arrived there instead of at his present destination he had only to make a slight detour and continue on his way. But he was not ready to go there yet, although he fully intended to do so later.

Then he heard the noise made by approaching footsteps, and with a last thought in which he was conscious of the hope that Ten-Ichi had followed Irma to her home, and was not far distant, the door opened and a stolid serving woman, unmistakably Russian, confronted him.

"You had no need to come to this door," she said, impertinently, in her own language; and she was turning away when Nick called to her to stop.

She obeyed instantly, but shot a suspicious and inquiring glance at him, and the detective realized that while his appearance had deceived her, his voice had not.

Purposely assuming a severe hoarseness and mingling his words with coughing, he said:

"I have taken a very bad cold. Show me into the parlor and inform Madam Aira that I wish to see her at once and alone."

It will be remembered that Nick spoke Russian with great fluency, and he assumed, from the woman's use of that language in addressing him, that it was also known to Thompson. As for his manner of speaking, it was evidently unusual, for the woman was obviously impressed by his tone, for she stared at him hesitatingly for an instant, and then, unconsciously dropping a courtesy, she obeyed.

Her curiosity, however, got the better of her judgment, for, after conducting him into the parlor, she paused as she was in the act of leaving the room.

"What has come over you, sir?" she asked. "I never heard you speak like that before."

"Obey me. Send Aira here at once," he replied.

"She won't come."

"Tell her she must come—that I command it."

"Humph!" grunted the woman, and she went out, closing the door after her.

Sooner than the detective expected, it opened again and Aira stood before him, and in the one quick, penetrating look that Nick could bestow upon her before she came forward into the room and addressed him, he knew that he had to deal with a remarkable character.

She was fifty years old, or more. Her figure was erect and her motions were energetic. Her brow was wide and lofty and her eyes, of piercing blackness, were shaded by brows that were unusually heavy for a woman. Here and there among the mass of coal-black hair Nick could see a few gray ones that struggled for recognition. There was absolutely nothing about her to indicate that she was a servant, and the detective was immediately convinced that if he had ever seen the evidences of breeding and character in a woman's appearance, he saw it then.

All this passed through his mind in less than a second of time.

"What important business have you got in your mind now, George Thompson?" she demanded. "Is it to pump more information out of me about that poor girl, and to run and tattle it to the Satan whose imp you are? Did I not warn you when you were here

last never to darken these doors again while we are here? I am sorry for you, Monsieur Thompson, but that does not prevent me from despising you."

She spoke rapidly and also in the Russian language, which was evidently the one in use in the household.

But she did much more than to merely ask these questions of the man she supposed to be standing before her, for she unconsciously did the detective a very great favor.

By the tones of her voice and her manner of speaking, Nick was assured that Dazaar was not in the house, and he felt certain that he could rely upon a short period of uninterrupted time with this woman. The disguise he wore had already served its principal purpose, since it had admitted him to the house without question, and brought him in contact with the very woman he most desired to see, and, therefore, he resolved to throw it aside at once—that is, figuratively speaking—and he therefore replied to her in his own natural voice.

"Madam Aira," he said, speaking in a low tone, but with marked emphasis. "I am not Mr. George Thompson at all. I am Nick Carter."

Such an announcement, given so unexpectedly, might naturally have been expected to fill its auditor with astonishment, but Madam Aira did not permit an eyelid to quiver. If she felt any surprise at all, it certainly found no expression in her face or manner.

"I can quite readily believe that you are not Monsieur Thompson," she said, calmly, "for he would never have had the temerity to call on me here, as you have done, nor could he have spoken in the voice you have used; but I am not quite as well prepared to believe that you are M. Carter, whom I have heard can appear in almost as many forms as Dazaar himself."

"Nevertheless, I am he," insisted Nick.

"I do not know that you are; neither do I deny that you are," continued Aira; "but if indeed you are M. Carter, the detective, permit me to assure you that you are at this moment standing within the greatest peril of your life."

"Indeed," said Nick, smiling with amusement. "How may that be so, madam?"

"Because, sir, this house is watched over and guarded from approach by a fiend who has as many eyes as a fly and as many ears as a multitude; as many hands as a legion of men, and more power than the czar; as many tortures for his victims as hell itself, and all the craftiness of the devil. It is easy to enter here, sir, but it is impossible to escape. You have walked into a trap from which there is no exit but death, and although I would help you to escape if I could, you are as surely a prisoner here, now, as if you were bound hand and foot with chains."

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE ARCH FIEND.

"I counted the consequences, or intended to do so, when I came here," said Nick.

"If you had counted them, you would not have come, for there can be only one consequence for you—death."

"You are prepared to believe now that I am Nick Carter?"

"Yes, since you assure me of it. I know that you are not Thompson. It can make little difference now who you are, save that I regret that one to whom I have looked for succor and assistance should also fall a victim to the toils that surround all who enter this house."

"Meaning me?"

"Meaning Nick Carter. Meaning you, if you are he."

"Has not Irma Plavatski returned to you yet?"

"Irma's body is here. Irma has not returned."

"What!" exclaimed Nick.

"I speak the truth, monsieur, as she no doubt endeavored to explain to you, and now, sir, I believe that you are Monsieur Carter, for I sent her to you. How then are you so much like M. Thompson?"

Nick explained, also telling her about the death of Thompson.

She merely shrugged her shoulders upon receiving the intelligence of his death, and in a voice that bore no trace of emotion, she said:

"I am glad, for his own sake, that Dazaar killed him

He will suffer no more the tortures of this place. But tell me, sir, did you see Irma?"

"Has she not told you?"

"I have said, sir, that her body returned to me, but that she had not arrived. Was it Irma whom you saw, or was it that she devil who sometimes passes under her name?"

"Madam," asked Nick, slowly, "are you all stark mad in this place?"

"Really, sir, I do not know. Sometimes I think we may be, and it is certainly a marvel if we are not. Certainly enough happens here to drive any sane person mad."

"Do you mean to tell me that the change that took place in Irma in my presence was really a change, and not the result of clever acting?"

"It is hard to believe, sir, but it is really true."

"Then let me assure you that I not only saw Irma, but also that other, whom you insist is not Irma."

"And Irma told you her story?"

"Part of it. I have come to you to hear the rest."

"If there is time."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because we may be interrupted at any moment. I doubt if Dazaar will permit us to remain long together. But, on the other hand, he may, knowing that you are in his power and cannot escape. It would be like his devilish glee to permit us to talk and plan together."

"Madam Aira, I did not come here to die. I came here to assist you and Irma, and what is more, to capture Dazaar and compel him to pay the penalty for his crimes."

Aira shrugged her shoulders again in true Russian style.

"When you can overtake and capture a phantom and hold it prisoner," she said, "you may be able to take Dazaar. When you chain all the evil in the world to one block of wood and behead it with a common ax, you will be able to hold Dazaar captive. When you possess all the powers of Omnipotence, you may be able to overcome Dazaar, but believe me, never until then."

"We will not discuss that now. Where is Irma?"

"She who should be Irma Plavatski is sleeping. When the body awakes Irma will have returned."

"Can we not go to the room where she is resting?"

"Yes. Come with me."

Without further words she turned toward the door, passed out and up the stairs, Nick following close behind her.

At the top of the stairs they passed along a wide corridor and then down another flight, thence through a second hall and finally ascended a second stairway.

"It is a strange house," said Aira, "well adapted for the purposes of the devil."

Presently she swept aside a pair of portière curtains, opened a door that was behind them and conducted the detective into a large, airy room in which the sun was shining brightly.

The furnishings of the apartment were sumptuously elegant, but Nick paid little heed to them, for, resting upon a couch at the farther side of the room between the windows, he saw Irma.

She appeared to be sleeping, but even as they entered she stirred and moved uneasily, so that Aira hastened to her side and bent over her. That one quick motion of the woman, together with the gesture of anxiety she made when she knelt beside the couch, did more to convince the detective of Aira's sincerity and honesty than anything else she might have said or done.

"Tell her who I am and why I look like Thompson," he said, drawing near. And then he moved to one side, beyond the range of her vision, and waited.

In a few whispered words, Aira explained all that had happened since the arrival of the detective, and in another moment Irma sprang to her feet and confronted him.

But she started back with a little cry of dismay, for although she had been told that he looked exactly like Mr. Thompson, she was not prepared for such a living likeness.

"I left you there, in the reception-room of your own house in the city," she exclaimed, as soon as she was convinced who he really was. "Tell me, please, what happened after?"

"Do you not know what happened?" asked Nick.

"No," she said, with quiet pathos. "How could I know? I was not there. Don't you remember that I warned you that the change was coming? That I besought you to let me leave you and you would not? You were standing between me and the door when I —when that other one came and I had to leave you."

"But," said Nick, "you had just told me that you always stood near by when that change took place and that you could see and hear all that took place afterward."

"Yes; and it is true, usually, but in this case I seem to remember nothing, only that you were endeavoring to prevent me from leaving, and then that we—that is, I, was in the carriage driving toward this place and that the horses were going at a furious rate of speed."

"Mademoiselle Irma," said Nick, speaking sternly, "will you swear to me that the change which seemed to take place in you while you were at my house was as real as it appeared? Will you swear that you have personally no power over such changes, and that it is your honest belief and conviction that at such times your body and person are possessed by another than yourself?"

"Yes, yes, I swear it. It is true, sir, believe me."

"I will try to believe that it is true," he said. "Madam," turning to Aira, "what have you to say?"

"Only that it is true, I cannot tell you how it is true save that it is a part and parcel with the machinations of Dazaar."

"Who is Dazaar?"

"He is the devil."

"I can readily believe that. But literally, who is he?"

"Literally, he is the devil, I do firmly believe. Once there was a Dazaar who was a high lama of Thibet. Those Thibetans, sir, are all devils, and this Dazaar is the incarnation of all of them rolled into one."

"Tell me what you can of his magic and his powers."

"Ah, sir, I can tell you but little. What we call magic is a science with him. I have heard him boast and I know what he says at such times; that is all."

"Tell me, then, what he says."

"Briefly this: In the mountain fastnesses of Thibet, thousands of years before our own earliest history was born, there dwelt a race of men who were learned in all things, but chiefly in the sciences concerning which we now know so little and which we define by the word occult. When the world was destroyed by flood and fire, Thibet survived, for it was hidden away in the mountains where fire did not burn and where floods could not penetrate. Throughout all other parts of the world, wherever there was a community of souls who survived, they degenerated again to savages that were little better than beasts, but there, in Thibet, their parchments, their documents and their men of learning were spared, and so they have gone on, through all these many thousand years, acquiring knowledge that is utterly beyond the understanding of the ordinary mortal man."

"Well? Go on, please."

"All this accumulated knowledge is in the possession of a few of their great men, who, it is said, never die, and of all these great men Dazaar was called the greatest, until he turned his great knowledge toward evil. For that, he has boasted to me, he was banished from Thibet."

"They would have none of him even there, it seems."

"So now," she continued, "he wreaks vengeance and pursues his studies by making humanity suffer. He has assured me that he is hundreds of years old; that he can change his form and features at will; that he can appear at any time or place he wills, through walls, locked doors, mountains, or across the world."

"And do you believe all this, madam?"

"I have seen the proof of it; nay, more, I am, myself, as well as this child here, a victim of the truth of it all. It is only too true, sir."

"Then, madam, we must lose no time in placing distance between Dazaar and this poor girl and yourself. Get your wraps, and quickly. We will leave the house while there is time. I will conduct you to a place of safety and return."

"Alas, we cannot escape," she replied, without moving. "Even now it is too late. Look behind you, sir. Dazaar is here, even now."

The detective turned like lightning, leaping to his

feet at the same instant, only to discover, standing calmly and smilingly in the doorway, the trubaned and shrouded figure of the arch fiend, Dazaar.

CHAPTER IX.

THE QUEEN OF THE SEVEN.

As Nick leaped to his feet and turned to face the human demon who had appeared in the doorway, he heard a muffled cry behind him, but, attributing it to natural fright on the part of Irma, and realizing that it might be fatal for himself to turn his head at that moment, he paid no heed.

He knew himself to be perfectly armed and knew himself quite capable of defending the women as well as his own person against whomsoever might attempt to enter the room and therefore he smiled back with equal urbanity upon the figure in the doorway.

"Has the dead arisen, or is this only a cheap imitation?" asked Dazaar, with studied irony.

"This, my considerate friend, is only an imitation," replied Nick, with great urbanity.

"And the occasion of this visit, Mr. Carter? I presume you are Mr. Carter?"

"Oh, yes, you were never less mistaken in your life. I am Nick Carter, all right."

"Why, then, are you here?"

"Well, there are several reasons why I am here, but before I utter them, let me ask you to look into this."

With a quick motion the detective raised both arms, and in either hand was one of those little weapons which Nick carried in his sleeves which never failed him. They were small in size, but their caliber was sufficiently large, and with either of them Nick could kill a fly at thirty paces.

"If you make a move that does not meet with my approval," continued Nick, "I will kill you, Dazaar."

"Indeed!" Dazaar shrugged his shoulders with marked disdain. "Now will you tell me why you are here?"

"I came here to take you back again to the prison cell from which you escaped this morning."

"Did you? What else?"

"To save these two women from your power."

"Ah. Do they want to be saved?"

"So they say."

"Do they? Ask them.'

"You cannot induce me to take my eyes from you, Dazaar."

"Very well. I won't try. But do you mean to tell me that you came here with the expectation of depriving me of my queen?"

"Your queen?"

"Irma is the queen. Has she not told you?"

"You are becoming facetious, Dazaar."

"Not at all, believe me. I think I once told you that I was only one of seven, did I not?"

"I think you did."

"Very well, Irma is the Queen of the Seven."

"Ah, indeed. The Queen of the Seven. Quite an exalted position to hold."

A peal of silvery, infectious laughter sounded behind Nick, and he recognized the voice of Irma Plavatski; but he also recognized a certain ring in its tones that had not been noticeable while he was conversing with her a few moments before.

"Tell him, Irma," continued the soft and even tones of Dazaar, "how nicely you have deceived him. Tell him to how great pains you and I and Aira were to lure him here. Tell him how carefully we planned that little trip of yours to the city. He would not believe me, but he will believe you."

Nick was still standing with his back toward the women. He was almost in the center of the room, and he realized that the position was a dangerous one, since he had no means of knowing how many other entrances there might be, and, therefore, who might steal in behind him and take him unawares. Therefore he decided to change his position, for the very attitude and conduct of Dazaar convinced him that the villain was only seeking to kill time until assistance arrived.

"Step farther into the room and walk around me, Dazaar," he ordered, sternly. "If you refuse, or attempt to go in the opposite direction, I'll shoot you."

Dazaar showed his gleaming teeth in a strange smile,

and, much to Nick's surprise, obeyed the injunction without demur.

"Anything to oblige you, Mr. Carter," he said. "I cannot forget that you are my guest."

"That is better," said Nick, getting his back against the mantel, and so covering the doorway and Dazaar at the same time, with the added assurance that no other person could enter the room behind him.

Nevertheless, he was in nowise prepared for what did happen.

Irma glided toward him with her arms outstretched and a most pathetic look of appeal in her great dark eyes.

He could not foresee what she intended to do, but he greatly feared that she would get between him and Dazaar, and he called to her to keep to one side.

For an instant she seemed to obey; but it was for an instant only. The next, she threw herself quickly forward, full into his arms, and clasped him, with her own about his neck.

Not a second elapsed before the detective succeeded in tearing himself loose from her embrace, but nevertheless his attention had been diverted sufficiently long for the purposes of Dazaar, who, the instant that Irma threw herself upon Nick, clapped his hands together.

The sound made by them was a signal upon which many dark and half-naked forms leaped into the room, and ere the detective could recover himself or make use of his weapons at all he was borne downward to the floor and pinioned there by the swarthy followers of Dazaar.

As quickly as a dozen eager hands could perform the act, he was tightly bound, and he realized that he was indeed helpless in the power of the most cruel and relentless human being—if indeed he was human—who ever lived.

And all the time that they were binding him Irma Plavatski stood beside Dazaar watching his captors with eager eyes and laughing in too evident glee at his dilemma.

In that moment Nick hated himself for having entertained a moment's faith in her, or belief in the story she had told him; and something of what was passing in his mind must have found expression on his face, for she came a few steps nearer to him when the men who had bound him drew aside, and, bending over him, she laughed aloud.

"Did I forget to tell you that I am Queen of the Seven?" she cried, derisively. "Did you suppose that you were entertaining an angel unawares when my coachman drove me to your house? Did my sweet face beguile you, you guileless one?"

Again she laughed, clapping her hands together in a very ecstacy of amusement at his discomfiture.

Nick made no reply, but he studied her narrowly.

Again he saw, or fancied that he saw, the evidences of change in her appearance that had been so noticeable while she was in his own house, and again her words of caution recurred to him, in which she had told him to look into her eyes and he would know that it was not the real Irma who looked through them.

Yes, he thought of all that, but he discarded the idea instantly. He could not bring himself to the unqualified belief that such transformations were possible.

"You were quite right when you told me that you were a sorceress," he said, coldly. "I believe now that the only truth you have ever uttered to me is contained in that sentence, for there must be something of the sorceress in you, or you could not have fooled me as abjectly as you did."

Again she laughed aloud in glee.

"I would not have believed you at all had it not been for your resemblance——"

He stopped speaking suddenly, for beyond her, beyond Dazaar himself, unnoticed by any one in the room save himself, his gaze lighted upon two surprising—yes, amazing things.

The first was the figure of Aira, drawn to her full height and with the fingers of one hand pressed upon her lips to enjoin silence upon him.

The other was—Ten-Ichi.

CHAPTER X.

WHERE TEN-ICHI TOOK A HAND.

Ten-Ichi, doubtless already concealed within the house when Nick arrived there, and consequently fully

aware of the presence of his chief, had somehow concealed himself in that very room in advance of the entrance of Aira when she took Nick there.

However it was that he was there, it was certainly the little Jap who raised his head above the back of a large, leather-covered chair behind which he was in hiding, so that Nick could see him and know that help was near.

A fact that was quite as surprising as his presence was that Aira also seemed to know of it, for even while she held her fingers to her lips, Nick knew that her range of vision could easily include Ten-Ichi and his hiding place.

"Surely the woman was sincere," he thought, "and if she was sincere, must I not, therefore, believe in Irma?"

In the meantime, Irma was still bending over him, but now her laughter had fled, and she was looking at him eagerly, with parted lips and hungry gaze.

"Continue," she demanded. "Who is it whom I resemble? Complete what you were saying."

"Most haughty and hateful Queen of the Seven," replied Nick, mockingly, "while you are as you are now, there is nothing that you resemble so much as my idea of a she-devil. I suppose that pleases you, does it not?"

"Yes; it pleases me, as you will have cause to know when I have set my tattooers to work upon your quivering body; when you are dreaming in the embrace of the Maiden of Steel; when you are confined in the needle room where there is not a quarter of an inch of surface from which the sharp point of a needle does not protrude to pierce your tender flesh; when you are put to bed in the spiders' cage; when you are confined for days at a time in the glass room, so that you can gloat upon the sufferings of others who are exhibited for your benefit; when you are rendered bald and beardless by the constant plucking of one hair at a time from your head and face and body; when your body is scraped with the rough edges of glass until it is raw from your head to your feet, and you are thrust into the room of flies and carrion beetles; when your tongue is made to swell with thirst, and you are given a teaspoonful of water at a time to quench it. Ha! Do you believe now that I am Queen of the Seven? Do you believe now that I have earned my title? Do you realize now into whose power you have fallen?"

To the infinite surprise of Nick, Dazaar stepped forward at that instant, and, resting one hand upon the shoulder of the queen, spoke rapidly to her in a language that was utterly unintelligible to the detective, but which, because of the rolling Aryan accent that accompanied it, he knew must be ancient Thibetan.

Whatever it was that Dazaar said to her, the Queen of the Seven faced humbly about and left the room, dropping the curtains behind her as she went.

Then Dazaar turned to the others.

"Go! Every one of you, go!" he commanded. "Leave me here alone with this man."

Like mist before the sun, the swarthy, half-clad Thibetans vanished through the door, following in the footsteps of the queen. Behind them all, with her head erect and her shoulders thrown well back, strode Aira.

She did not look back once. She made no further effort to sign to Nick; but she did more than merely drop the curtains behind her, for she closed the door also, and to Nick's listening ears it seemed as if he could hear the clicking of a lock as it shoots into place, when she did so.

Nick was still stretched at full length upon the floor, and the rope that bound him had been passed again and again around his body, fastening his arms to his sides and cleaving his legs together as if they had grown that way.

Without a word, Dazaar lifted him in his arms as easily as if he were a babe, and, carrying him across the room, deposited him in the very chair behind which the detective knew Ten-Ichi to be concealed and awaiting a favorable opportunity to give proofs of his existence and presence.

And it seemed to Nick at that moment as if the opportunity was almost at hand.

"Well, Mr. Carter," said Dazaar, standing before him and looking down upon his captive with an expression that was much more humorous and quizzical

than ferocious, "what do you think of the situation now?"

"It appears to be rather binding," replied Nick.

"It does, indeed. Are you still jealous of my possession of the Queen of the Seven?"

"No. I think you are welcome to her."

"I think you have already gleaned some idea of the joy I find in the suffering of others."

"Well, yes, I think I have."

"Then believe me when I say that the ecstasy I enjoy when witnessing the torture of a fellow creature is as a drop in a bucket compared with the pleasure it affords the queen. She lives upon it."

"So I imagine."

"I doubt not that you are greatly puzzled by that same queen, and by her whom you call Irma?"

"I will confess that I am."

"As well as by my escape from the custody of your friend the inspector, eh?"

"Not at all by that. Anybody who is a professional hypnotist might have accomplished that. You were merely fortunate in being guarded by two perfect subjects."

"Quite true. Quite true as far as it goes, but, my dear Mr. Carter, you have much more to learn."

"Doubtless."

"Do you know that I am puzzled concerning what it is best to do with you?"

"Are you? Why?"

"Because I am not ready to begin your physical tortures yet. You have not passed through the three phases of mental torture, and until you do, you cannot be a perfect subject for the others. Really, Mr. Carter, I am more than half inclined to let you go."

"Are you, indeed?"

"Yes. I will think over it a moment."

Dazaar turned his back upon Nick and the chair in which he was seated, and strode across the room with his head bent forward, as if deep in thought, and the instant he did so Ten-Ichi leaped silently into view and with lightning-like flashes of his razor-edged knife severed each separate coil of the confining rope with which the detective was bound, and Nick raised himself to a standing position.

So quickly was the act consummated that Dazaar was not more than halfway across the room before Nick was free and gliding after him with the quickness and silence of a panther.

Then, as Dazaar was about to turn, Nick leaped upon him, clapping one hand over his mouth to prevent him from crying out and bearing him, by the full exertion of both his weight and strength, to the floor.

But Nick need not have covered his opponent's mouth, for it was instantly evident that Dazaar had no thought of calling assistance to him; and, moreover, in doing so, the detective became minus just the power of one hand in his struggle with his enemy.

That Dazaar was a veritable giant of strength was quickly evident, for as soon as the detective seized upon him, he turned like an eel in his grasp and threw his own arms in turn around Nick.

The turban fell from his head, and the East Indian robes in which he was swathed fell from him, so that the detective soon found that he was engaged in a struggle with a man who might have dressed for the arena so far as his costume was concerned, and who certainly possessed the strength and science of an arena gladiator.

The tightness of the cords with which Nick had been bound had retarded the circulation of his blood, and Nick was by no means master of his full strength when he grappled with Dazaar, but he had not stopped to think of that, for it was so rarely that he had ever had occasion to exert even a great part of it, that he believed the villain would prove an easy adversary.

But the fact was the contrary.

Dazaar's strength seemed in every way equal to Nick's own, and, added to that, he had the advantage of being almost unclad, and consequently of the full and unobstructed use of his arms and limbs.

For a moment they were locked together in a deadly embrace, and then they crashed to the floor, neither underneath, neither on top, but side by side, and——

Ten-Ichi glided forward.

It is difficult to forecast how that struggle might

have ended had not Ten-Ichi been there to aid his chief. That Nick would have won in the end cannot be doubted, and yet neither can it be assured.

But Ten-Ichi was there, and he was prepared.

He glided forward so quickly and so silently, approaching Dazaar from behind, that the apostle of evil neither saw nor heard him, and the first intimation he had that there was another person than themselves in the room was when a handkerchief in which a sponge saturated with chloroform was contained was pressed closely and tightly over his nose and mouth and held there, despite his struggles to resist.

With the giant muscles of the detective holding him on one side and the wonderfully sinewy arms of the Jap clinging to him on the other, and the chloroformed sponge held relentlessly against his mouth and nostrils, there was no escape for him, and he succumbed.

"Ten-Ichi," said Nick, rising, "you are a jewel. Get me that rope and tie it together where you have cut it, and do you put a good and effective gag in this fellow's mouth while I bind him.

"Now," he added, when that was done, "unless I am greatly mistaken, that door is locked, but I have a notion that Aira is not far distant, and I think if you will tap lightly upon it, she will answer. Ah! I was right."

Almost upon the instant Ten-Ichi's finger tips touched the door it opened, and the strong, but thoroughly good face of Aira appeared at the opening. A smile of exultation shone upon her face when she saw Dazaar upon the floor, and she came forward hurriedly, snatched a steel paper cutter from the table and would have buried it in Dazaar's heart had not Nick caught her arm as it was descending.

She looked up at him when he did that, and without a word permitted the knife to fall to the floor, but as she straightened herself on her feet, she murmured:

"I will obey you, but you will regret that you did not kill him when you had the opportunity."

"Where is Irma?" demanded Nick.

"Asleep in the next room. When she wakens, she will be Irma, not the queen."

"Where are the Thibetans who were here with Dazaar?"

"Gone, as he ordered. He sent them back to the other house when he sent them from the room."

"Are there horses in the stable?"

"Yes."

"Are they guarded?"

"Only by a drunken old man who will not waken, and who can be silenced if he does. I am afraid nothing now that he is there."

"How many horses are there?"

"Five."

"Can you ride?"

"Like a Cossack."

"Good. We will ride to the ferry. I will take Dazaar across the saddle with me. Ten-Ichi will make Irma's sleep a little deeper with chloroform, and he will carry her. You, madam, will go to my house with me, or to the hospital with Irma, as you choose, but go you must, both of you. Ten-Ichi will take charge of you. As for this fellow, I will see that he is returned to a cell where something more powerful than hypnotism will be required to liberate him; and, Madam Aira, if there are doctors in New York who can explain the malady from which Irma Plavatski suffers, they shall have an opportunity. Come, Ten-Ichi. Make haste. This has been quick work, but, all the same, I do not care to lose time in getting away from here with my captive. We'll return, though, later, my lad."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 374, will contain "The Sign of the Dagger; or, The Crime Without a Name," the third in the wonderful new series of Nick Carter stories in which Nick calls science to his aid in solving a terrible series of murders.

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